# SUNRISE TRUMPETS

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JOSEPH AUSLANDER

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# Sunrise Trumpets

*By* Joseph Auslander

# Sunrise Trumpets

*By* Joseph Auslander

*With an Introduction by*

Padraic Colum

*Publishers*

HARPER & BROTHERS

New York and London

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To My Father

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# Foreword

It is no wonder that Joseph Auslander is at his best when he writes of water, for his poems have flowingness and abundance as if from a sure spring; and it is no wonder he writes well about birds, for, over and over again, he makes phrases that are as natural and as happy as the turns in a bird's song. It might be said of him that he discovers the dawn-world for us; it is as if he, going forth before the rest of us, noted the stillness and space of the world . . . noted "cool roots, cold stones," and saw, as the only conscious being in that world, crickets "on dripping planks," earthworms that stir "tremendously in the dew," and heard birds with dew in their throats. Perhaps it is from a revelation that has come to him in that untumultuous world that he knows of climaxes of such hushed intensity—"Guinevere moving slowly to her veil," and "Lazarus, after the cover had lifted, staring at Christ. . . . He had come far." Yet, this young poet is of the dawn even when he writes of the twilight and the starlight. Hesperus, who brings the sheep and goats to fold, as Sappho sang, need bring back nothing to him, for daylight has scattered none of his flock.

He brings us no new forms; he brings us gracious old ones. And his choice of forms reveals him for what he is—a troubadour, a troubadour

who has slipped into the New World. He loves words just as much as he loves things, he loves poetic forms just as much as he loves the forms of living creatures; he goes back again and over again to the figures of the great age of Romance. Yet there is no calculated reconstruction here: in all of Joseph Auslander's poems there is much of the boy's will, and in the poem in which the poet has to be most adroit we catch the eagerness that might be in a boy's song:

> "Let them have your laughter, give me only
> All the withheld tears, the broken glory,
> All the depth and silence of your spirit."

Perhaps later on he will break up the set forms he is using now to give us more often the intensity of the sympathy he has with—

> "Things too small for a name
> Moving through private tunnels down to their instant of flame."

Moods of grief and loss are expressed, but for all that his book is a book of high-hearted verse. Indeed, it goes some way toward restoring a quality that has been left out of a great deal of verse that is being written in the New World in our time—the quality of delight. Read even the poems that have a sense of loss in them and you will know what

delight this poet has had in the color and sound of the world, and in the sight of its living creatures—"a ship striking it green," chickens in a yard that make "a drone of dust," the snail's horn "lustrously dank," and the earthworms that tunnel "in their cool closets." He has been able to give us his delight in phrases that we cannot help but remember. How good his phrasing is! We will long remember his dead Yseult with her "eyes like blue stones washed in a windy place." A book of high-hearted verse, I say, and a book that has in it the ardencies of youth. "White" is an adjective that is often finely used in it. "White April days," the poet says, and we feel that many of his poems have come to him on white April days. "Something vigilantly white has marked his way," he says, and we think that it is his own way that the poet has so marked.

PADRAIC COLUM.

## *How Love Stands!*

*Rain is going through deep ground to-night,*
*Your body is in the ground;*
*The air booms with one shadowy sound to-night,*
*One sound.*

*O beautiful tired eyes, O tranquil hands,*
*My proud pale father, see*
*Between you and the downpour how Love stands*
*With me!*

# Acknowledgment

For permission to reprint certain of the poems in this book I am indebted to the courtesy of the editors of the following magazines: *Asia, Contemporary Verse, Poetry, The Atlantic Monthly, The Bookman, The Harvard Advocate, The New Republic, The North American Review, The Measure, Voices,* and others.

# Sunrise Trumpets

# 1. Words

WORDS with the freesia's wounded scent I know,
And those that suck the slow irresolute gold
Out of the daffodil's heart; cool words that hold
The crushed gray light of rain, or liquidly blow
The wild bee droning home across the glow
Of rippled wind-silver; or, uncontrolled,
Toss the bruised aroma of pine; and words as cold
As water torturing through frozen snow.

And there are words that strain like April hedges
Upward, lonely words with tears on them;
And syllables whose haunting crimson edges
Bleed: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!"
And that long star-drift of bright agony:
"Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani!"

## 2. Invalid

SHE has the look of statues, having lain
Many years in her bed
That was like a cave where pain
Is gathered into corners and quieted.

She has been lying so stretched out full length
For many years till some
Of the bed's straight lassitude and strength
Is in the cool white thing she has become.

If now the violet and parsley bloom
She asks nothing of these:
She keeps in the pale area of her room
Something saved over from old agonies.

## 3. Forget!

LET your anchor go whinnying down: it should strike
Deep into some merman's pearl-assaulted skull;
Or—if you like—
A nereid's throat white as death and as beautiful,
A nereid's hair streaked weed green, rust gold where pike
And inquisitive shark teeth pull.

Forget home and the half-friends; forget the soft mouth
Syllabling lovely treacheries; forget the hollow words,
The dust, the drouth—
Everything! Go with the sulphur wings and the sapphire birds
And the cream curves of the great gulls screaming south
And the whales in wallowing herds.

Forget! Let nothing make you remember; allow
No pale intrigue of rose-leaf dust, no pressed clover;

## Forget

Let no sound now
  Haunt your brain with the old crushed cry of the
    lover;
Forget you ever touched a cool skin, a quiet brow—
  Let your anchor go over!

## 4. Instead of Tears

INSTEAD of tears my eyes have stones
In them; tears can become as hard;
I have had tears enough and groans
Enough: a wounded animal moans
A little, then is on his guard.

Now I can think of you without
Love, without hate; I can think
Steadily about such things; about
Things like stones that leave no doubt;
Dark earth and water cool to drink.

I am like a child to whom
Accustomed curves and edges mean
What to an invalid his room
And the sweet regulated gloom
And the implicit soft routine

These reassure and satisfy
Heart and brain and hand and slow
Rovings of the anxious eye. . . .
I think, if you should pass me by,
I should not know, I should not know.

## 5. Water

WATER remembered, treasured up;
Water that has never touched an earthen cup;
Held only in the creased hollow of a hand . . .
Trickling through, flickering silver, furrowing black sand;
Water tapped at the source
Of damp cool precincts, moving without force:
Even and quiet and confident and clean
With all the beauty of some suave machine—
These things, these phrases wrenched themselves softly loose
Like young tulip bulbs or the inside grass spear whose
Rootless white green end is sweet to suck.
So the phrases filtered through, light struck,
Pulled loose from the intricate loam of thought and spaced
Themselves because you laughed; and got unlaced
Because you laughed at something that I said . . .
Your laughter was like water—not drink merely, but drink and dark-grained deep-breathing bread.

## 6. Stamboul

I LOVE you as men love the strength of cities;
You are darkness and rivers of darkness under
the stars;
None so gazed on Troy—Oh, a thousand pities
That marked Troy down for terrible calendars!
There have been sailors and merchants and long-eyed
dreamers,
Hollow, cadaverous, bearded, who left all ease
For the wild beauty of a ship with streamers
And the sweet madness of Asiatic seas.

Surely these burning men that have desired
The throat of Stamboul or the buoyant hips
Of young untamable Tartar-sinewed ships—
Surely they drank deep and their hearts grew tired
For the cool tusk of the moon, a woman cool . . .
You are my ship with streamers, my Stamboul.

## 7. Unfurl the Flags of April!

FRAIL larch-shadows glimmer liquidly,
Edged with the tremor of bewildered rain;
The pines are stenciled lank and vaporously
In oscillating mist; roots writhe and strain
To one more cool wet grasp of earth: O Spring,
In hollows where the furtive water hums
A vehemence of rich remembering
Unfurl the flags of April! Beat your drums!

In every corner of the woods and valleys
Flutters the little talk of violets;
Gust after gust leaps out, flaps loose, then rallies;
The reed tastes fire; the white dove tenderly frets;
I walk over brinks of beauty, shivering:
Unfurl your flags and beat your drums, O Spring!

## 8. Downpour

SHATTERED silver the rain is falling
Over the drowned moon in the sea;
The muffled horns of the rain are calling
Reluctantly.

Snuffed are the candles in the houses;
The wet birds ruffle close together;
A lank mare, unremembered, drowses
Drenched at her tether.

Roads are rutted and old wagons
Lumber and lunge on sunken stones;
The rain at a thousand gusty flagons
Gurgles and groans.

The reef whitens its chain of rock
Under the downpour's hammering;
Clouds encounter, and the shock
Sets them stammering.

Shattered silver the rain is falling
Over the drowned moon in the sea;
The muffled horns of the rain are calling
Incessantly.

## 9. Sunrise Trumpets

DIM wind pillared the hills: stiller than mist it seemed;
Somewhere water challenged silence, somewhere water failed;
Spiders brooded thick in silver and the willows dreamed . . .
Then the wind crumpled richly; night paled.

Black-eyed starlight dimmed; a voice blushed timidly;
Somber crimson crouched in shadow, rifts of hazel fire:
Dawn a drowsy eagle, and the brief audacity
Of thrushes fluting through the dew—one choir!

O the lift, the liquid blindness of their throats!
O the high white music and the blue plumes of the wind!
Up! the crested moment points a sword! the flashing notes
Of sunrise-trumpets! Up! dawn is javelined!

## 10. To a Certain April Somewhere

THEN, like an unknotted sling of flame,
All that you dumbly were you dizzily became:
Shock of the blood hurdling for beauty, beauty!
Roots on edge with April, biting up through stark earth-bone!
And the great crushed smell creeping out of the rain . . . vaguely known . . .
Yet fiercely familiar: remembered reek of things just turning fruity;
Scent of rapid and black gold, water and stone!

Bats will go floundering at dusk; the loon
Dive down the rickety staircase of the moon
Scissoring lake water; herons will flap over
Blue, glinting turquoise. . . . O Night Appassionata, you are
Warm reeds and resinous wood choked with a beating star!
You are terribly beautiful! You are Lazarus, after the cover
Had lifted, staring at Christ! . . . He had come far! . . .

## II. Touch

I HEAR a cricket at my window sill
Stitching the dark edge of the dawn; and now
The climbing siren of a distant cow
Rouses the sun over the eastern hill.

A cock is rapping in four rickety words
His challenge to the sluggard; and a bell
Jargons like water dripping in a well;
And dew is in the throats of all the birds.

I need but outstretched hands and I embrace
The luxury of leaves: yet, while I lean
On their long coolness, I can feel the keen
Light of your fingers drift across my face!

## 12. A Blackbird Suddenly

HEAVEN is in my hand, and I
Touch a heart-beat of the sky,
Hearing a blackbird's cry.

Strange, beautiful, unquiet thing,
Lone flute of God, how can you sing
Winter to spring?

You have outdistanced every voice and word,
And given my spirit wings until it stirred
Like you—a bird!

## 13. Enigma

THE swallowed thud of cattle shouldering through
Cool translucent distances of dew;
The blue dawn like a shell warmed by their lowing;
The patter of pigeon feet on the roof; the rooster crowing;
The tepid interval when pale birds cheep
Beneath their wings; the flutter muffled with sleep;
Crickets on dripping planks; the delighted noises of things that creep
In subterranean softness: things too small for a name
Moving through private tunnels down to their instant of flame. . . .
Strange how beautiful these things are; how these
Things are still beautiful; strange
That our sweet flesh falters, knows ghastly change—
And these things are still beautiful under the hawk-dark trees!

## 14. In Envy of Cows

THE cow swings her head in a deep drowsy half-
circle to and over
Flank and shoulder, lunging
At flies; then fragrantly plunging
Down at the web-washed grass and the golden clover,
Wrenching sideways to get the full tingle; with one
warm nudge,
One somnolent wide smudge
Sacred to kine,
Crushing a murmurous afternoon of late lush August
to wine!

The sky is even water-tone behind suave poplar trees—
Color of glass; the cows
Occasionally arouse
That color, disturb the pellucid cool poplar frieze
With beauty of motion slow and succinct like some
grave privilege
Fulfilled. They taste the edge
Of August, they need
No more: they have rose vapors, flushed silence, pulpy
milkweed.

## 15. Somewhere a Lonely Bird

SOMEWHERE a lonely bird makes incoherence lovelier
Than song of knitted gold:
O I have never heard
Slim water beating in a white-birch thicket
Or deftly-syllabled singing bird
So frail, so fugitive, so uncontrolled!

I will not speak, nor with the shadow of my listening
Affront your loneliness;
Let me the rather go
To mine, the agony of stammered words
Your wild dark throat can hardly guess,
Your wild dark music never, never know.

## 16. Dawn at the Rain's Edge

THE drowsy, friendly, comfortable creak
Of axles arguing and wet spokes gleaming,
When old empty tumbrels blunder dreaming, too sleepy to speak,
Blunder down the road in the rain dreaming.

And the house-lights rub at the shining dripping shadows
Over the windows; through the drenched silver willows; everywhere:
In the sulphurous fluctuant marsh this side the steaming meadows
Where black weeds trouble the moon's drowned hair.

There is a sudden fuss of draggled feathers and the swing
Of winds in a hissing burst of raindrops; then a cry
Of color at the hill's rim; a strange bright glimmering;
And a lark talking madness in some corner of the sky.

## 17. Wet Silver

THE Gothic girders of Spider Castle
Are fretted with pulver of rain, harassed with rain-dust glitter;
The Gothic girders of Spider Castle
Sag silver; the fog drips beauty into the sparrow's twitter;
Lustrously dank is the snail's horn, his armor glistens;
Now the hush, soaked silver: and still my heart listens and listens.

## 18. Is This the Lark?

IS this the lark
  Lord Shakespeare heard
Out of the dark
  Of dawn? Is this the bird
  That stirred
Lord Shakespeare's heart?

Is this the bird whose wing,
Whose rapturous antheming,
Rose up, soared radiant, became
Sharp flame
To Shelley listening
And made him sing,
Throbbing alone, aloof, feveredly apart,
His profuse strains of unpremeditated art?

To think that I should hear him now
  Telling that single fiery rift of heaven a wild lark comes! . . .
The fresh cool scent of earth yearns at the plough;
  In short keen rapid flurries the woodpecker drums . . .
To think that I should hear that mad thing sliding
  Along a smoking opal ladder!

## Is This the Lark?

Hear that inevitable deluge of music riding
  Into the sun, richer now—fainter now—madder!
To think that I should hear and know
The song that Shelley heard, and Shakespeare, long
    ago!

## 19. Sleepy Bird-Talk

A PALE light is pinned to the hill;
There is blur of sleepy bird-talk:
Little complaints stifled, little queries twittering still—
Then the night like a hawk.

Your mind was elsewhere. I said
They are snuggling down—the birds
Are snuggling down. . . . You are not listening; your head
Hums with lovelier words.

## 20. Messenger at Dusk

AGAINST the warm green reticence
Of dusk, the drowsy parliaments
Of leaves, a fragile spirit brings
His voice, his wings.

The purport of the stars is in
His breast; he is their paladin:
His lonely cadence flashes white
Before the night.

No stealthy shadows can suppress
That bird's triumphant wistfulness:
He has the starlight to rejoice
His wings, his voice.

## 21. Berceuse for Birds

NOW that the twilight slants the curled edges of wheat
And the bats go about amazed with dusk,
And there is the slurring sound of furry feet
Where wheat ear chafes wheat ear, husk rubs husk—
And the noise of them is sweet;

Now that wind shadow moves in a devious arc
Through fluttered blue flags, willow colonies;
And the nest-hovering little meadow lark
Is hushed with numerous anxieties;
And there is bronze rumor of bees—

Slowly, with eyes withdrawn and intricate,
Sleep of the moon-soft eyes, advancing slow,
Sleep, interceding and compassionate,
Sway the mother lark's eyelids to forego
Vigil: touch her so.

## 22. Home-Bound

THE moon rims the wavering tide where one fish slips,
The water makes a quietness of sound,
Night is an anchoring of many ships
Home-bound.

There are strange tunnelers in the dark, and whirs
Of wings that die, and hairy spiders spin
The silence into nets, and tenanters
Move softly in.

I step on shadows gliding through the grass
And feel the night lean cool against my face:
And challenged by the sentinel of space—
I pass.

## 23. Dim Gates

THERE is a wind in the cedars,
A wind roughens the sea;
The lambs bleat for their leaders
Dolorously.

The wind chatters on the sea-wall
And wrangles with the rocks;
Pained and precise shudders the call
Of the flocks.

Far off a lone latch clicks and grates,
A voice beats thin and dies:
Death is a closing of dim gates,
Dim eyes.

## 24. Winter Fear

ALWAYS I will be followed by the cautious, insistent leaves;
Autumn will shadow me across the wind-streaked hills;
Always a lank blue heron will shift out of the north
When the river chills
And the hounds of the frost go forth.

There will be time, later, to burrow in and sleep:
Not now when the poplars wrap their nerves against the bite
And snarl of the jagged gusts. Not now. Later, I know,
There will come the white
Dead hours of sleep and snow

And the incessant staggering of bitter swift green dusk
Under the fusilade of sleet; the bludgeoning dark
Beating the gaunt horizon down in a blind rage of stars! . . .
O I know his mark
And the welt of his branding-bars!

## Winter Fear

I hate him! . . . If only I could fight off that dull
Odor of sleep! If only I could fight it off!
That creeping smell of the frost settling down like
a hood . . .
Like a long hard cough . . .
If . . . if . . . only . . . I could . . . !

## 25. Mother of Quiet

QUIET clings to her tread like sandals,
Her vestment moves with no sound,
Wheresoever she walks, there
Is holy ground.

Her fragrant body is a soft fire
Burning honey and wheat;
I shut out tumult, hearing
Her still feet.

I would be as the moss, a depth
Under her step, for she
Touching my restless heart
Would hallow me.

## 26. To a Nun

NEVERTHELESS I shall nowhere reach
The beauty of your tired hands:
They know the solitary speech
That only agony can teach,
That only weariness understands.

Although I had hoped, foolishly,
By suffering to obtain their grace;
Forgetting how the agony
Is merely half, how quietly
Your hands have found a certain face.

## 27. Il Magnopoco

LIT by soft fire, softened by light, he goes
Forever between chaos and repose;
But there are shadows drumming in his heart:
He loves the veins of beauty, scorns the art
That muffles with a haunting golden hood
The plunge of pistons roaring through our blood.
Always beginning where he had begun
He heaps his frantic towers to Babylon;
Fingers a phrase, derides it, weeps, and makes
Gestures that are as beautiful as snakes;
And then, and now, and always wearies of these,
Is drenched and scorched by alternate ecstasies;
And ends again and again with the same threat:
"Some day I shall get the sun, some day I shall get
That multitudinous disk: all flame will pass
Into a pin-point under a piece of glass!"

## 28. Interval

WATER pulls nervously whispering satin across
cool roots, cold stones;
And a bird balances his soul on a song flash, a
desperate outcry:
These are the minor chords, the monotones;
This the undefeated gesture against an armored sky.

The moment is metal; the sun crawling over it is a fly
Head down on a bronze ceiling; the hot stillness
drones:
And you go sliding through green sea shafts and I
Am an old mountain warming his tired bones.

## 29. Exiled

NEVER will I return with the black-eyed sea birds,
The white-bodied sea gulls spilling the beauty of their throats into the north:
I am banished from their places; they go wheeling wind-blown;
But my feet are pointed toward savage towers; I am driven forth.

I have no heart in the heaviness of men; I am shaken
Like a thin spear-shaft by the speed of the sea gulls, their screaming cuts deep:
It were better, if I must walk exiled, I should not awaken;
It were better to sleep under water if water would let my flesh sleep.

The wet pattern of gull tracks along the sand coral is smothered
Beneath foam; and the birds give their pale swift beaks to the west. . . .
Would to God, now this hour breaks, I had never been mothered!
Let their cries go sharp over me; let their chilled feet tread my breast!

## 30. Atque Vale

DAWN comes edged; sparrows wrangle;
The cardinal blossoms bleed;
Along the sucking marshes dangle
Blue spikes of the pickerel weed.

Jewel weed in the ditches
Washes silver; Spider Spouse
Delicately yanks and hitches
Glitter to her dingy house.

Spotted orange butterflies
Tipple; and the dipping bees
Loot the thistle: and their thighs
Glow with brilliant burglaries.

Wasps suck out their last, unravel
Cell by cell: and I know
The melancholy road to travel
Strains beneath my feet . . . I go.

## 31. Gray Mother

AFTER all, Gray Mother, after all is said
And done, Gray Mother, he can do no more
Than come back like a lost dog to your door,
Sniffing the salt and slinking to his shed,
The sound of water going through his head,
Water and the noise of things he knew before—
A ship striking it green, the jolt and snore
And hiss of oil, the moan of the searching lead.

Ask anybody who ever brawled with water
To say how the windy scuffle wins his blood;
Ask any son of any seaman's daughter
To say how the smell at old wharves makes him brood:
Gray Mother, after all is said and done,
He must come back, your deep-sea daughter's son.

## 32. Sea Death

WHERE there is no end of the sea, earth looming
Slowly to dent, swiftly to disappear;
Where there is no end of the sea and the sea's booming
Bells reverberate in a liquid sphere
Profound and submarine and solemnly clear;

Where there is no end of the sea and the sea
Shoulders a shaggy furore with green recoil
Continually; and where continually
Cool skeletons in incessant release from toil
Slide sideways, released incessantly from soil—

There, as one comes accoutered in blue steel, pounding
A black basin at a black pavilion, so
I shall come shrouded in flesh for the sea hawk sounding
His hoarse clarion: and then I shall know, I shall know
Those dappled floors where men and fishes go.

## 33. Oakum

LEAVE the snarled shaggy oakum; wash your hands of the smell:
All day you have hanked the fiber. . . . The hatches of the west are down.
There is rope and tackle chatter; remonstrance of a channel bell;
Gossipy lights go pointing through the town.

Come, white stars rock in the harbor; the dinghy clucks and strains;
Her sharp bow tastes the phosphor dust, her keel bites green and cold.
To-night all anchors tug at the moon; wet fire stumbles on the chains;
The hushed oars feather into shaky gold.

The thole pins click and stutter. . . . God, for all the wharf-slap, water-slosh
Your hands are itching after oakum, fingers wrenched apart;
The hunger and the hurt of rope is on you: you will never wash
That sticky smell of oakum out of your heart!

## 34. The Ship Sings

WIND-TORN, wave-worn, still I sing delight
of it,
Buffeted of breakers, I am jubilant and free!
Storm-trod, nearer God, flung into the fright of it,
Battered to the teeth by the sea!

Rail-wrenched, sail-drenched, swung along the swell
of it,
Lifted to the level of the rime-stung stars!
Deck-chopped, wreck-dropped, down into the hell of it
Under the thunder of the bars!

O I love the lulls of it and the happy gulls of it
When the water-width is one slow lapis-lazuli,
But the magic weave of it dances in the heave of it—
Give me the lunging sea!

Wind-torn, wave-worn, out into the shriek of it,
Shipping dizzy green to the crow o' the mast!
Gale-battered, sail-shattered, full against the beak
of it—
Give me the sea to the last!

## 35. Sea-Desire

AT every keel-dent in the deep,
At every liquid rim,
At all wharf-lappings,
Wheresoever seaweeds creep
And fish swim,
By all sail-flappings—
Let my soul be
Endlessly.

Let me face the tidelight now,
Its glint and shiver;
The dank green smell at the bow
Of any ship
On any river—
There let my soul slip
Out of me
And be!

## 36. I Know a Place

BETWEEN the wind-swept grasses and the swell
Of the flecked and freshening sea I know a place
Scented with warm spray always. Here I trace
Into the soft sand words of an old farewell
When I am sad, or else I weave a spell
Of rapture from a cool Egyptian vase
Remembered in delight, and here the grace
Of quiet comes upon me like a bell
Heard beneath water faintly audible . . .
Here with the privilege of one dear face
To look upon, God grant that I may dwell
Through the white days of April and the days
That follow in a flower-tumult, space
And the spilled foam murmuring into a shell.

## 37. Lone Gulls

LONE gulls are being blown about the sky
Like snow smoke, and my heart can hear them cry
Brokenly over the cliffs of wind an old
Song for the gull that shall no longer fly;
And now the west gleams acid blue with cold,
The sun sinks fiercely bleak like frozen gold,
But memory of you melts my grief, and I
Feel your warm fingers loosing the winter's hold.

For though the flinty stars be scraped with frost
And sharpened a savage green against the dark,
And gulls lament the gull for ever lost,
You touch my spirit's numbness to a spark
Until December blazes like July . . .
Lone gulls are being blown about the sky.

## 38. Barnyard Siesta

THE sulky gradual querulous content
Of chickens puffed and blinky in the sun,
Swelling into their scooped holes, one by one,
Blundering a grieved squawk to resent
Trespass or dispute of tenement;
Then, grieved or peeved, the argument grudgingly done,
Dozing down to a vast oblivion.
Though irritations after the event
Continue to emerge, their sounds are smothered
In the baked somnolence, the only intrusion
That of a chick who, set on being mothered,
Succeeds in making an ecstasy of confusion:
But otherwise the world is a drone of dust
Where bills open to sigh as softly they must.

## 39. Three Things

THREE things filled this day for me,
Three common things filled this day;
Each had, for me, a word to say;
Said it in beauty and was done:
Cows on a hillside all one way,
A buttercup tilted seductively,
And a lark arguing with the sun.

These three things, merely these three,
Were enough to cry the world
Out of my heart: the buttercup curled
Where some gorgeous ruffian plundered;
The skylark's dizzy flag unfurled;
The placid cows pensively
Wondering why they wondered.

## 40. A Sandal String

NO more than this: a sandal string.
Some little child of Egypt wore
The sandal, and has left—a string . . .
No more.

Yet fingers tied it when it tore
With too much dizzy frolicking
Of warm brown feet across the floor.

And when death came in like a king
Silently through the bolted door
Some mother kept a sandal string . . .
No more.

## 41. Just Now

JUST now . . . O blown too faint and still,
A shudder of tone, I know not how . . .
But some one called me from a hill
Just now.

A moth beats at my hair and brow
A soft gray song that leaves me chill . . .
The moth blurs blindly on somehow.

A bird sang madly and a mill
Hummed and a wet smell edged the plow,
And your white hand was warm . . . until . . .
Just now.

## 42. And Yet . . .

AND yet your laughter was with us
Untouched, unshadowed of regret;
And you walked on the hills with us—
And yet

Our little paths are smoking wet
With April, and a tremulous
Pale scent stirs in the violet.

The rain still patters murmurous,
And still under a blown sunset
We stand, and still you call to us—
And yet . . .

## 43. To-night

TO-NIGHT the moon is bannering
A black tree, and through the dark
Some vague inevitable wing
To-night

Flaps in a blinding swarthy arc
Across the moon . . . blind . . . shivering;
One star burns dully like the spark

Of death's last candle guttering
In sunken gold: and words blurt stark
To your chilled lips, and there they cling
To-night.

## 44. Marie Antoinette

AT last they looked on your soft hair,
Absurd, imperious, lovely one,
And rode you to the bloody square
At last.

And in that motley there was none
To toy with you and name you fair,
No orange-blossoms and no sun.

Only the scarlet Robespierre,
The ax's kiss and benison
On your white neck and your soft hair
At last.

## 45. Bellerophon

BELLEROPHON, your name to me
  Clashes the cymbals of the sun
And rides the green dusk windily,
  Bellerophon!

  Not Ganymede, nor Corydon,
Nor any king of Arcady,
  Not fire-plumed Hyperion—

Not one of these dins audibly:
  The fierce wings of your name outrun
White sea-hoofs thundering on the sea,
  Bellerophon!

## 46. I Have Waited for You Long

I HAVE waited for you long: the sun withdraws
To covert under the hills; I am alone;
No bell disturbs the evening monotone;
I seem to merge with those implacable laws
That left the pyramid a graven pause
In some gigantic attitude of stone.
There is an advent I have never known,
There is an imminence that overawes.

Approach me, making pallor with your feet:
I have waited for you long, my cold white one;
Let not another muffled night repeat
The tragic gesture of oblivion;
Let all death be remembered in your tread . . .
You will not walk with me when I am dead.

## 47. I Know It Will Be Quiet When You Come

I KNOW it will be quiet when you come:
No wind; the water breathing steadily;
A light like ghost of silver on the sea;
And the surf dreamily fingering his drum.
Twilight will drift in large and leave me numb
With nearness to the last tranquillity;
And then the slow and languorous tyranny
Of orange moon, pale night, and cricket hum.

And suddenly there will be twist of tide,
A rustling as of thin silk on the sand,
The tremor of a presence at my side,
The tremble of a hand upon my hand:
And pulses sharp with pain, and fires fanned,
And words that stumble into stars and hide.

## 48. Your Hands, Your Hair

YOUR hands go breathing over me,
A warm breath follows them:
Christ in His agony
Knew how tender hands can be—
Christ on His Tree,
Christ in Bethlehem.

Your hair shadows my blood-beat
Cool as cyclamen:
Christ in His winding-sheet
Remembered hair against His feet
Bitterly and blindly sweet . . .
Oh, the hair of Magdalen!

## 49. White Night

ONLY silver and the crickets, and the moon
straight up and still,
And a steamer thinking dim across the tide,
And the breathing of the backwash so thinly audible,
And the white night trembling wide.

The latch that holds the dream of a ghost lifts
stealthily,
Lifts, and stirs, and lets a wind slip through:
And now the loosed wind raps a hollow knuckle on the
sea,
And the sea stares a frightened blue.

The currents of the water fret against a sullen beach,
Soft phosphorus intrigues the hissing sand:
There is no voice, and yet I hear a strange and
shadowy speech;
No hand, and yet I feel a hand!

## 50. Haunted Solitude

THERE is the solitude of gypsy tents,
Abandoned fires and forgotten graves;
The solitude of clangorous conclaves
Of rooks when night is gray in cerements:
And then the silence death left desolate,
The candle in a stupor, the locked gate.

You, who have broken bread with beauty, know
The lonely grandeur of departed feet;
They pulse against the traffic of the street,
You hear their music through the blinding snow:
The passionate indifference of the dead
To all pursuit, the rich taunt of their tread.

## 51. Abyss

DO not believe in this night:
The stars are not central enigmatic gold;
But sulphur, yellow and old
And ash white.

The sky is ragged and patched
To hide the holes clawed out by clamorous birds;
Do not trust their words
Dæmon-hatched.

Go no nearer:
Earth is a shell where only shadows toss—
Tattered ghosts blown across
A cracked mirror.

## 52. Wild Geese

ONLY the other night, it seems, I saw the wild
geese trekking
In a black lanky wedge across the moon,
Their sharp frost-silvered wings flecking
The zenith. . . . And now in a fever of harsh
maroon,
Burnt scarlet and tarnished bronze, the great ground
whirl
Of leaves twists to a frenzied skirl
From autumnal pipes, the dervishes of brilliant
blinding death
Shuddering, weaving, spinning—faster and fiercer
—without breath!
O that last rich barbaric dizziness, the smoke of pearl,
The crimson axes of the heat hissing through,
The final lividly exultant blue
Crackle of dust!—and then the acrid silence and the
hard green glitter of hoar-dew. . . .

Only the other night, it seems, only the other night
You passed with the passing of familiar light
From the sky and a certain hill: Oh, at your dying
There was a sound of wild geese crying, crying;

## Wild Geese

There was a sound of leaves that give up trying
To glow; and all wild beauty drifting, shifting
South, interminably south! . . .
But I cannot give up remembering your swiftly quiet
hands and the half-frightened hint of peace
over your eyes, your mouth.

## 53. Death Came Knocking

DEATH came knocking, knocking,
Knocking in the night;
Death came knocking, knocking,
But the door held tight.

His thin fingers could not pry
Between the slit and the latch's click;
And one eye peered through the keyhole,
And his breath snarled quick:

"Only a lodging for the night
For a traveling gentleman"—
And his twitching knuckles drummed
A sinister rataplan.

But we drove the desperate heat
Of our pulses into the pulse
That flickered under the sheet
And forced the eyes to convulse

Back to the fumbling stare
Beneath dank sweat on some
Familiar far-off chair
Or pot of geranium. . . .

## Death Came Knocking

Then as terror's cord
  Relaxed its frozen hold
On our foreheads like a sword,
  We chattered limp and cold.

And stabbed blind with fatigue
  At length, we heard as snow
Behind shut windows the knocking
  Stop, the stark feet go.

## 54. The Return

WHEN the last hearth fire drowses to the drone
Of an embered blow, I shall be standing there
In the warm shadow close behind your chair
Where the grave depth of quiet takes a tone
Of deepe , graver quiet from your own:
And should you feel a tenderness on your hair,
And on your eyes the hovering breath of prayer,
Be not afraid and make no startled moan.

For it is only I that am returned
To look on you and love you out of pain,
And it is but my hand on you again,
My blessing even through the darkness burned;
And should you feel the nearness of a tear
Over your lips, know that my lips are near.

## 55. Last Song

I WILL blow my last song to the moon's dingy door
Hastily sealed; I will blow my song through the slit,
Through the cobwebbed crevice between the door and the floor
Where hairy old moon-spider grandmothers nod and knit
I will blow my last song.

Then some night when the wind rustles velvety thick
With moist yellow jasmin-stars, and the smell of rain
Drifts an impatient silver, the door will click
Dreamily ajar, and misty with moon-spider skein
My last song will blow down.

## 56. So There Are No More Words

SO there are no more words and all is ended;
The timbrel stilled, the clarion laid away;
And Love with streaming hair goes unattended
Back to the loneliness of yesterday. . . .
Gray-eyed, and with dull tread, and with no moan,
Proud, unreluctant, marvelously pale,
You step into your solitude of stone
Like Guinevere moving slowly to her veil.

So there are no more words and all is over:
The bronzed battalions of the twilight wheel
Along the sky's concave. . . . I was your lover;
Went glowing; wind and fire at my heel. . . .
All's over, ended; there are no more words—
A gust of wet leaves under the huddling birds.

## 57. Covenant

THIS, then, is the covenant you shall keep
Under your heart as men keep what they lose:
A memory of bugles after sleep,
A consecration and a glittering truce.
Even if you should suffer—and you will
Terribly—at least there cannot be
Ascent without the solitary Hill,
Peace without the passion of the Tree.

So you will walk alone, yet not alone;
Though beauty pierces, beauty can assuage;
The pillow or the ladder in each stone
Shall rest or lift you on that pilgrimage:
Till suddenly—twisted, bleeding, black with scars,
You shall go throbbing out across the stars!

## 58. In the Temple of Nofertari

YOUR eyes dazzle: shut your eyelids lightly
On them; your eyes glow: they are green coal
Now, with a wind moving under them slightly,
And like a twitching mendicant my soul
Shivers before you, stripped, stark naked. . . . Shut
Your eyes, for love of God! Iron—ice—
Would burn! I am mere paper! And you cut
As fire through dust, flame through the sacrifice!

I will not be your moth, your rich dull umber
Drift of scorched wings, or your sapphire bird
Stabbing at glass! . . . Let a long pansied slumber
Velvet your lids, your dazzling eyes grow blurred
With anguish of their Egypt dusk, your lids
Curve to the stillness of the pyramids!

## 59. Yseult

BRUSH the mold from Yseult's hair and face:
And you will find that swarthy furious gold
Still smoldering under the blanket of black mold;
And you will find those eyelids frail as lace;
Eyes like blue stones washed in a windy place;
That mouth whose glowing motion once controlled
Cornwall and Lyonnesse; that throat as cold
As a long curve in water, white as a vase
Of moon-swept ivory: you will discover
That body whose keen pallor was a sword
Unsheathed only for one lord and lover,
Flashing only for one lover and lord:
Your eyes will blur to find with sharp surprise
Tears burning on her eyelids and her eyes!

## 60. Marked

BELIEVE me, there is enough strength left in those
Dead syllables we buried so frantically
A year ago, to make the thought of a rose
Or a river with lights press like an agony,
Go like a spear through my blood, come on me
Like a weight of frozen fire! . . . And yet we suppose
We can shut our teeth and forget! . . . And that bravery
Glitters an instant, and then as instantly goes.

For he whom love has troubled can never quite
Lock out the proud insistence of the sound
Her feet give: something vigilantly white
Has marked his way and shadowed him and bound
His forehead with a cord of terrible light,
His throat with strings that shall not be unwound.

## 61. To My Despoiler

YES, you have taken everything from me:
  Beauty and love and all the treasuroess
Impatience of proud April; even our sea
Shouting under the gulls; all that we
  Had touched: the curve of things we used to press
Glowing against our senses, mystery
  And movement . . . everything taken . . . taken
    . . . yes,
Even the little brave irrelevancies
  Like brooding water, dripping watercress,
The cool dark noise of cropping, cruising bees
On hot gold expeditions—even these
  You took from me—Oh, spare me your caress,
  Leave me at least my own bleak loneliness!

## 62. Pendulum

NOW the stealthy sunrise hoverer
Hangs like a long hawk shadow over the sea;
And now the wings of gulls whir stealthily,
Shaking shadowy water as they whir. . . .
Let earthworms tunnel in their cool closets, stir
Tremendously in the dew; let the blunt bee
Nose buckets of damp gold—what is that to me?
What is beauty without an interpreter?

Egypt—and no Rosetta Stone to read
The mockery of the Sphinx; Dante in Dis
Stark blind without the eyes of Beatrice;
A spring dawn twittering, dripping bead after bead
Of fire; . . . and I without your love as dumb
As any clock without its pendulum.

## 63. I Struck a Word

IF you have earth to work with, you will make
Pitchers and plates and things that you can trust;
But if you work with words or wings, they break,
Leaving you desperate amid their dust.
Give me the certainty of metal, bronze
Or iron—and I will hammer them to shape:
These have fixed areas and environs,
And when you strike them, they do not escape.

But in a foolish moment, flushed with dreams,
I scratched my finger nail along the Lamp
Of the Widow's Son—and now the sullen screams
Of cheated jinn invade my lonely camp:
I struck a word—and now that word becomes
Keener than lance-tips, deadlier than drums!

## 64. Martyr

YOU scorned the shallow fanfare of return;
To you the thought was hell and worse than hell;
Self-banishment, if bleak, was charitable:
No sly soft words, no letters you must burn,
No friendships and no memories to unlearn.
The world's most cautious finger could not sell
Your exile; nor the world's most brazen bell
Tempt whom it taught so massively to spurn.

At Salamis there was an exile who
Remembered Athens; and a lonely prince
In a castle; and a certain lonely Jew
That loved Jerusalem; and many since:
And you who poured your veins out to convince
The multitude that hailed, then hooted, you!

## 65. Paint Me the Glory of a Furrowed Face

PAINT me the glory of a furrowed face
Where death's dim fingers have begun to feel
Their way in silence, lingering to trace
The beauty of their passage and reveal
Only the grandeur of a hope fulfilled
And slowly mellowing to the mightier close:
When the brief turmoil of the heart is stilled
And the brave hands are clasped in strong repose.

Eternity bends low to seal those eyes,
Those lips, those tender tired hands that sleep
In the last autumn twilight when the skies
Drop a cool star down to the dreaming deep . . .
See, death himself has paused, lest even now
The splendor of a thought flame on that brow!

## 66. Wings

BEAUTY is so calm;
There is such passional stillness in the gaze
Of beauty: she is the balm,
The blaze.

Her hands go veiled in mist:
Brooding horizons gradually seem
Her hands: the Eucharist,
The Dream.

O whom frustration shards
And splinters in the crash with things as things,
Take what no barrier retards—
Her wings!

## 67. Love and the Garlands

LET them have your laughter, give me only
All the withheld tears, the broken glory,
All the depth and silence of your spirit;
What have I to do with your exalting?
I can simply touch your fragrant garlands
Timidly, and wonder why you let me.

Always when I ask you why you let me
You seem half afraid, and tell me only
That I am the goddess of your garlands
And my fingers touch them into glory
Loftier than all the world's exalting,
Warm still with the murmur of a spirit.

O if I could hover with my spirit,
Breathe my wings about you! If you let me
Bruise them, let them bleed for your exalting,
They would know a darker flame that only
Comes when love is crushed and burned with glory,
Comes when love is dust beneath your garlands!

For I cannot weave you any garlands,
I can merely offer up my spirit

## Love and the Garlands

On the breathing altar of your glory,
Dumbed with one desire: will you let me
Burn at least for your sake, blaze, if only
To be one more torch for your exalting?

Sappho sang her heart out in exalting
Love, and braided for him throbbing garlands,
Yet the young white-throated shepherd only
Smiled and took with them her bleeding spirit. . . .
O if love, the lord of flutes, would let me
Fill some pulse of music with your glory!

But my song is silence, and my glory
Silence, for the moment of exalting
Chokes the song: and love will never let me
Wreathe a lyric mist into your garlands;
Rather will the tumult of my spirit
Beat its own voice down and leave you only.

You alone, one voice, amid your garlands,
While I kneel beneath your singing spirit
Hushed, and hear your chords of triumph only!



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For several years Joseph Auslander's poems have been familiar to magazine readers in this country. Again and again the editors who select from current magazines the most memorable verse of the month have given his lyrics a distinguished place.

This volume places him immediately in the small group of noteworthy younger American poets. It is a book packed with sheer beauty of image and phrase; a book, says Padraic Colum in his foreword, which "goes some way towards restoring a quality which has been left out of a great deal of verse being written in the New World of our time—the quality of delight."